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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a national 3-year project, the Empowered School District Project, which was implemented in nine school districts to empower school participants. This paper focuses on the efforts to empower students by helping them become independent, lifelong learners. The project was implemented in nine schools--five elementary and four high schools--in nine school districts across the United States. Data were derived from observation, faculty interviews, audiotaped conferences, reports of principal-staff meetings, focus-group interviews with students, and analysis of school documents. Findings are presented in terms of illustrative case studies and theme analysis. Schools that were most successful in creating empowered students demonstrated the following themes: an intense focus on students as a school value; action on that value by creating opportunities for student personal control, the development of self-efficacy, and performance competence; an early identification of a definition of student empowerment; flexibility and resourcefulness in meeting the needs and developing the skills of students; and the creation of a school environment supportive of risk taking and experimentation. It is recommended that schools striving to create an empowering school environment develop trust and facilitative leadership; create a culture supportive of experimentation; enhance student leadership with problem-solving skills; and select an outside facilitator. (LMI)

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Empowering Students: Variables Impacting the Effort

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Running Head: EMPOWERED SCHOOL

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Abstract

This paper describes a national three-year project in nine school districts to empower school participants. In particular, this paper focuses on the efforts to empower students in order to help them succeed by becoming independent, lifelong learners. Findings are presented in terms of illustrative case studies and theme analysis. Key themes in schools that were most successful in creating empowered students include: an intense focus on students as a school value; action on that value by creating opportunities for student personal control, the development of self-efficacy, and performance competence; an early identification of a definition of student empowerment; flexibility and resourcefulness in meeting the needs and developing the skills of students; and the creation of a school environment supportive of risk taking and experimentation.

Empowering Students: Variables Impacting the Effort

During the past several years, reports commissioned by foundations, legislatures, and corporations, along with articles and publications of reform, have advocated the restructuring of public education with the empowerment of school staff members (Carnegie Forum Report, 1986; Cuban, 1990). The assumption is made in this literature that when staff members are able to initiate and carry out new ideas through their involvement in decision making, learning opportunities for students are enhanced. Traditionally, school-level personnel have been excluded from critical decisions including personnel allocation and hiring practices, curriculum, budget allocation, and scheduling of teaching time.

Although the term, empowerment, is of recent vintage, the concept of employees helping make the basic decisions of the organization can be found in the management literature dating from the 1930s. Studies in participative decision making in business and industry today have revealed increased worker productivity and sense of ownership in empowering environments where increased worker involvement in key decisions takes place (Peters, 1987).

Currently, the major thrust to empower school participants appears to take the following forms: (1) Providing teachers with a significant role in school decision making thereby developing a sense of shared governance; (2) Providing teachers with control over their work environment and work conditions; and (3) Providing teachers with opportunities to contribute to the school in a range of professional roles: teacher, administrator, curriculum developer, mentor, learner.

Though school restructuring, empowerment and teacher autonomy have become national foci, little direct assistance has been given to districts in developing empowered schools. Much less emphasis has been placed on developing empowered students. This project is a direct attempt to help nine school districts create empowered schools and empowered students. The project reported here

provides the first data on such efforts nationwide.

The Empowerment Project

The nine school districts, two universities, and an educational foundation embarked on a three-year effort to empower school participants. These districts undertook to create school environments where professionals and staff exercise the belief that they can impact life and learning in the school and are given the opportunities to act on those beliefs.

The Empowered School District Project involved school districts representing a mix of urban, suburban, and rural settings. In each of the districts, one school was designated as a participant school. This school was granted autonomy; it was free from the mechanisms a district would normally use to coordinate the school. The nine schools ranged in size from 225 to 2500. There were five elementary schools, one of them a private school, and four high schools in the project.

Theoretical Framework

The concept of empowerment that serves as the cornerstone of The Empowered School District project has its history in early work on participative decision making and more recent work on self-managing teams. In addition, current trends in technology and revolutions in the way people will perform in the workplace during the next decades provide frameworks for considering why empowering students is critical in restructuring schools.

Participative Management and Decision Making

Participative decision making has been defined by Crane (1976) as a management approach which allows and encourages subordinates to participate in decisions that will affect them. Earlier, Lowin's study (cited in Dunstan, 1981) described participative management as an organizational operation by which decisions are arrived at by including those persons who are to execute those decisions.

Patterns, Purkey, and Parker (cited in Rice, 1987) concluded that putting decision-making power as close to the point of delivery as possible makes implementation of those decisions not only possible, but successful. Erickson and Gmelch (1977) indicate that the overall benefits of adopting a team management approach to school governance include improving the quality of communications and decision-making practices, staff motivation, and the enhanced coordination of tasks and plans.

Self-Managing Work Groups

The concept of the self-managing work groups has its origin from business and industry literature (Hackman & Oldham, 1980). In self-managing work groups, employees take personal responsibility for the outcomes of their work, manage their own performance, and monitor, reinforce and reward the work of the group (Hackman, 1986). Research on self-managing work groups in schools (Kasten, Short, & Jarmin, 1989) indicates that interdisciplinary teaching teams in middle schools are an example of this concept.

Creating Lifelong Learners

Over the next two decades, revolutions in the technological base of our society will alter the knowledge, skills, and values that people will require to be successful in the workplace. Business leaders forecast that current data processing and information systems will be replaced by "...sophisticated devices for knowledge creation, capture, transfer, and use (Dede, 1989, 23).

With the advent of self-managing teams and problem-solving networks in the workplace, the collective knowledge, skills, and creative energy of a group of individuals will be the structure for task completion in effective organizations (Peters, 1987). Characteristics of future jobs demand organizational participants who are flexible in both thinking and action as knowledge expands and job requirements shift. Participants must be able to work in collegial, collaborative problem-solving teams

that function with great independence (Dede, 1989).

Empowerment

Empowerment is defined as the opportunities an individual has for autonomy, choice, responsibility, and participation, in decision making in organizations (Lightfoot, 1986). Jenkins (1988) states that "To empower others is to give a stakeholder share in the movement and direction of the enterprise" (p. 149). Staff members who are able to initiate and carry out new ideas by involvement in decision making should, in turn, create enhanced learning opportunities for students (Lieberman & Miller, 1984; Short & Greer, 1989). Traditionally, school-level personnel are excluded from critical decisions including personnel allocation and hiring, curriculum, budget allocations, and scheduling of teaching time (Zielinksi & Hoy, 1983).

School restructuring has, as one of its components, the empowerment of teachers, administrators, and students (Murphy & Evertson, 1990; Short et al, 1991). In fact, the restructuring paradigm of Murphy and Evertson includes empowerment as a integral part of reform. Lortie (1975) depicts teachers as working in isolation from other teachers. Little collegial contact is ever realized as teachers perform their craft in separate rooms. In addition to working in isolation, teachers are expected to complete reports and maintain orderly classrooms. These "around the clock" tasks tend to absorb available time for collegial interaction and contribute to the isolation of teachers.

Research by Gruber and Trickett (1987) conducted in an alternative school identified the importance of control over decision making in empowering participants in school organizations. Rinehart and Short (1991), in a study of empowerment of teacher leaders in the national program called Reading Recovery, found that teacher leaders saw opportunities for decision making, control over their daily schedule, high level of teaching competency, and opportunities for growth and

development, as empowering aspects of their work.

Rappaport and his colleagues have described empowerment as a construct that ties personal competencies and abilities to environments that provide opportunities for choice and autonomy in demonstrating those competencies (Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988). Dunst (1991) has suggested that empowerment consists of two issues (1) enabling experiences, provided within an organization that fosters autonomy, choice, control, and responsibility, which (2) allow the individual to display existing competencies as well as learn new competencies that support and strengthen functioning. Indicators of an empowered person include functioning as an active problem solver, displaying competencies, engaging in self-evaluation, and experiencing success in activities in which one engages (Dunst, 1991).

Project Objectives

The purposes of the project centered on the facilitation of empowerment of teachers, students, administrators, and other staff. More specifically, the objectives were (1) To assist central office administrators and board of education members in establishing autonomous, productive schools (free to make decisions about hiring, budget, curriculum); (2) To assist principals in reconceptualizing their roles from that of directors of their schools to developers of human potential; (3) To assist teachers in learning to make decisions and accepting responsibility for their decisions; (4) To assist teachers in reconceptualizing their roles from the directors of classrooms to developers of student potential; (5) To empower students to become independent, life-long learners; and (6) To chronicle the empowerment process in each project school so that other schools may benefit from the experiences.

The Embarkment

The project was initiated at a three-day conference of representatives from the school districts.

These representatives included each district's superintendent, participating school principal, and one teacher from the school. Two universities were represented by the project directors, and the foundation by a vice-president. Schools were selected based on opinions of national educational consultants and the two project directors that principal-teachers relationships were positive and that the schools were recognized within their districts as being good schools.

The conference established a collaborative environment with districts developing plans to network for further sharing of empowerment efforts and mutual support. District teams spent their team time discussing and developing a three-year tentative plan that reflected an initial year of **formulation**, a second year for **developing and testing**, and a third year for **implementation**. The project was intentionally designed for a three-year period in order to give districts time to develop their own individual approach to the empowerment process and an empowerment model to fit the individual school context.

It is important to note that this empowerment project was not initiated with a packaged empowerment model, developed by outsiders, that would be installed in each participating school district. The project attempted to model how the empowerment process takes place in an organization (Bandura, 1979). Thus, each school was encouraged to develop its own plan and to work toward the plan's accomplishment, though aware of the work being conducted in other project schools. Of course, the sharing of experiences between schools was a major benefit from project participation.

Resources

Facilitators from a local university or private industry were selected by each school to provide assistance as requested: collect data, give advice, conduct staff development, and so forth. They worked with the school principals and faculties on request. These individuals were skilled in

organizational development and previously had experience in working with change efforts in school organizations or private industry.

The project directors provided training, support, staff development assistance, and guidance. They visited in the schools across the nation, published a project newsletter for sharing information and ideas among the schools, and regularly distributed relevant research and other materials of interest to each district empowerment team.

A teacher at each school served as a chronicler of the events of the three-year empowerment process. All chroniclers received training in data gathering procedures.

Methodology

Data Collection

A teacher from each school was trained in qualitative data collection methods (interviewing, observing, document analysis) by one of the project facilitators. This teacher served as a chronicler, recording events that occurred in each school relative to the project. This was necessary in order to capture the most important activities and events occurring on a daily basis in each of the schools. Data collected included field notes from 30 observations of faculty meetings, 30 team and committee sessions, and some informal classroom observations. All agenda from these meetings as well as documents circulated in the school relative to empowerment efforts were collected. All faculty were interviewed once a year by the school facilitator and teacher-chronicler to assess perceptions of empowerment efforts. The principal prepared a tape recording monthly reporting empowerment efforts and perceptions about process, issues, problems, successes, and concerns. All interviews and principal recordings were transcribed by a trained secretary.

Verbal and written reports were collected at each of the 4-day meetings of the principals,

facilitators, lead teachers, and chroniclers held at various locations around the country. Observations of classrooms and overall school life were conducted by one of the project facilitators or the school facilitator at least 2 days per month for each of the 3 years of the project. In many cases, observations were conducted on a bi-weekly basis during the first 2 years. Focus-group interviews were conducted with sets of students at the project schools during the third year. In some cases, those interviews were videotaped for analysis purposes.

Data Analysis

Data from observations, interviews, chronicler notes, school documents, and periodic project meetings and conferences were coded according to guidelines for grounded theory research. Grounded theory research centers on the discovery of themes and categories important to the phenomenon being studied (Bogdan & Biklin, 1982; Miles & Huberman, 1984). The constant comparative qualitative research design was used to ascertain the themes and categories of critical issues in facilitating student empowerment efforts. This process involves (a) beginning data collection, (b) developing initial categories, (c) collecting data related to categories with an eye towards diversity under each category, (d) writing and describing incidents under categories, (e) continuing to engage in sampling, coding, and writing as analysis continues with a focus on existing categories or development of new categories (Bogdan & Biklin, 1982). Themes and categories began to emerge from the within-school analysis. Triangulation was assured by the use of both multiple data sources and multiple researchers (Patton, 1990).

The Cases

Case studies of four of the project schools are presented to illustrate school efforts at empowering students during the three years. During the analysis process five significant themes

emerged as powerful issues in creating greater student empowerment.

Case Study One

This school is a large high school located in the suburbs of a major metropolitan city in the southwest. The student body of 2800 students represent middle to upper class socioeconomic levels. The school enjoys excellent physical facilities with many additional resources available to the school from businesses and industry found in the large metropolitan area.

The 175 faculty members, for the most part, are experienced professionals who have been selected from a large pool of potential teachers. The school has a prestigious reputation among teacher applicants. Consequently, the faculty are highly qualified and most have advanced degrees. They can be characterized as having high initiative, professionalism, and advanced skills in teaching.

The principal had been at the school for five years when it entered the project. He has served in principalships in a variety of settings. He is innovative, resourceful, and well connected with the business and community leaders in the larger metropolitan area. He also serves as an adjunct professor of educational administration at an area university. He has advanced skills in planning, evaluation, and group process. He had established a collaborative relationship with faculty at an area university in order to gain from the university's expertise. In return, he encouraged the professors to conduct collaborative research with faculty in his school. In essence, he asked the university to "adopt" his school. This openness to resources, new ideas, and change is characteristic of the principal. One practice by the principal was to send a faculty member anywhere in the United States to see a new program functioning in a school that might have merit if implemented at this school.

It is important to note that the principal provided the impetus to become involved in the project. He had worked previously with one of the national project directors and greeted the school's selection

with much enthusiasm. Upon return from the Chicago conference, he immediately selected a "team effectiveness trainer" at a major area corporation to become the facilitator for the school. This choice was based on his desire to see the team concept implemented in his school and to provide appropriate training for these changes. He had also had prior experience a national association for "total quality management" and had begun to incorporate some of the concepts from Deming's work into his management approach.

In late fall, the facilitator and small groups of faculty began sessions with the student council to determine appropriate ways that the council could work with faculty to solve problems and create a vision for the school. Individual classroom teachers held discussion sessions within classes to look at "problems, successes, ways to make the school better in the future." Results of these sessions were conveyed to the department heads who brought them to the Advisory Council. The results eventually led to the decision to develop leadership retreats for students.

Year two marked the beginning of Leadership Retreat, a weekend retreat for students and any faculty who wished to attend conducted by four team effectiveness trainers from Xerox, Boeing, Otis Engineering, and GTE. The first session was conducted in the spring of the year. The first fifty students who volunteered and several faculty were participants in the first Leadership Retreat. The training focused on the leadership, problem solving, and group process skills needed by team members.

Upon their return, students were enthusiastic about their experience. One student said, "I learned that I must take responsibility for the success of my team. Just this week, I was messing around in the hall before a class and it was as if a light went off in my head reminding that I am responsible for my positive behavior and the effectiveness of all of the teams on which I work." Another

student stated, "I learned leadership skills that I now use in my classes and in the clubs in which I belong. I help get decisions made, and I feel better about handling conflict. Most of all, I feel responsible for making good things happen." Finally, one of the members of the football team said, "I thought I understood how a team should work together. Now I see my role as a team member even within my classes."

By year three, all teachers had participated in the team effectiveness training. The focus shifted to training the students at the Leadership Retreat. In order to find additional funding for the venture, a student-faculty team developed a video to show potential supporters in the business community. It is important to note that students attend the retreats at no charge. The school supports the entire venture. The team effectiveness trainers from the four corporations donate their time during the weekend retreats.

In the spring, students who had participated in Leadership Retreat made a presentation at the American Association of Quality Control. Their presentation featured discussions about responsibilities of team members, new skills learned, and the new relationship with teachers that evolved in the retreat. One student stated, "We learned to really talk and communicate." By the end of the third year, four Leadership Retreat sessions had been held.

Case Study Two

This school is nestled in an urban setting in a large city in the midwest. The large high school has approximately 1800 students in grades 9 through 12. The student populations can be characterized as highly multicultural. It has often been called the "United Nations" of the school district. There is a high concentration of Asian Hmong, Vietnamese, and Hispanic students in the school and in the surrounding community. The faculty is diverse with one faculty member serving as president of the

local teacher union. The principal, who is Hispanic, was in her second year at the school as the project began.

During the summer prior to the Chicago conference, the principal organized a "Think Tank" consisting of 16 school personnel which had begun meeting. The purpose of this group was to generate goal statements and innovative ideas for redirecting the school towards becoming a better place for students. After attending the Chicago conference, the "Think Tank" became a vehicle for dialogue about empowerment and what the process would mean for the school.

One decision by the "Think Tank" was to establish action committees around the 11 goals or value statements developed by the "Think Tank" over the summer. Those values related to valuing each other, literacy, interpersonal communication, skills, purposeful direction, critical thinking, creativity, self-discipline, life readiness, social conscience, and open/nurturing/safe environments. Parents, teachers, students, and administrators were placed on the action committees. The committees addressed the question, "If this is one of our beliefs, what should we be able to see happening in the school to illustrate that we have acted on that belief?. The action committees worked throughout the first year.

It became evident the first year that the principal believed in networking with the community, business, and industry in order to find resources to support initiatives within the school. She worked very hard to build linkages and dissolve boundaries between the school and community resources. A prolific grant writer, she secured funds from a statewide business alliance, the governor's office, and many businesses in the state.

In February of the first year of the project, the governor of the state visited the school to view the innovative activities being developed in the school. He had heard about the school after its

selection for the Danforth project and said that he wanted to visit schools that were doing creative things.

While visiting the school, the governor held a meeting with faculty to talk about empowerment. At the session, a number of the teachers credited the principal for her vision and initiative in bringing about greater focus on teacher empowerment in the school.

One of the major innovative programs began the first year was the Lincoln Alternative Milestone Program (LAMP), a school within a school that was designed to help selected students be successful in school. Students could enroll for as few as four or as many as six classes during the day. Classes were geared to individual needs, abilities, and academic credit requirements. Lessons relate academic skills to everyday living situations. Many units also emphasize the interdisciplinary nature of the academic subjects.. Teachers serve as advisors to a group of about 15 students to monitor grades, attendance and school progress. The program provided many resources for students through its mentor program. Business people act as mentors to provide students with a positive role model and help them to stay in school and to introduce them to the business world.

Parents are contacted frequently and encouraged to be an active part of their child's education. The LAMP teachers try a variety of techniques to reach these at risk students. Variable credit can be given for work completed in order to give the students as much success as possible. Funded in part by the state alliance of business, area business personnel served as mentors to the students in the program. The experiential program enjoyed a teacher-pupil ratio of 15 to 1. Efforts were made to totally individualize the educational program for each student.

Over the following summer, many committees met and readied several new programs for experimentation during year two. The successful implementation of the LAMP program during year one

seemed to give confidence and fire to taking risks with even more creative ideas.

The school implemented the "School of Global Studies" in the second year. The focus for the school was interdisciplinary with English, math, science, and social studies taught in a 4-year curriculum. It was a team-taught seminar which focused on providing a non-traditional, interdisciplinary approach to education from a global perspective. The students worked with their teacher/advisors in a variety of activities and experiences to help students understand more about themselves and the world in which they live. The program explores course material in the context of an overriding theme or issue (i.e., environment, health, conflict, etc.) and students are expected to participate in community service learning experiences as well.

The School of Global Studies was designed primarily to encourage students to think critically and become more aware of the variety of perceptions, values, and priorities that exist locally and worldwide. Students in the program are provided with the analytical and organizational skills necessary to help them appreciate and understand the world in which they live. Students are encouraged to challenge themselves and others when considering world issues and the impact of the issues on their lives. The program's goal is to help prepare students to live successfully and productively as adults in a rapidly changing world. Students are considered for the program based on an application and interview process.

In discussion form, during the second year, was the formation of four divisions which would make the curriculum more relevant to the needs of the 21st Century. Additionally, the faculty wanted to create smaller collections of students so that the students would feel a greater sense of belonging that is easily lost in a large student body of 1800. The other divisions were a School of Technical Arts, School of Business Education, School of Fine Arts, and the School of Exploratory Studies.

By now, students were understanding the notion of empowerment. They took the initiative to form the "Student Coalition on Responsible Education." This committee structured many activities to give students responsibility and opportunities to exercise leadership. During year two, the students in the coalition planned a statewide conference on student empowerment. This conference was held during the following summer.

During year two, the faculty began the development of a Guaranteed Graduate philosophy. The essence of the philosophy was to ensure that graduates would possess the skills needed for entry into the workplace and post-secondary education.

The third year of the project for the school was an exciting year with the implementation of many ideas developed and tried out during the first two years. However, one decision brought an interesting reaction from the empowered faculty. The principal decided that the school would move to block scheduling. When this was announced to the faculty, they were most upset. Their response was that they were an empowered faculty so why did the principal make the decision? The faculty, therefore, developed seven different proposals for the block scheduling. They held three public hearings and selected one. They decided on three daily 88 minute blocks and three 45 minute blocks. What is interesting to note is that when the principal made the decision about the block schedule, faculty felt very disempowered. This was very serious to them. Fortunately, the principal understood their concerns and empowered them to take leadership in designing the schedule. At issue was the fact that the principal had been urging faculty for several years to think about moving to block scheduling. Faculty would not move on question so she decided to take the leadership. However, the faculty did not want to be disempowered and responded by assuming leadership in the development process.

The primary goal of block scheduling was to improve instruction by increasing time on task, thereby enabling the teacher to fully utilize effective scientific teaching strategies and techniques that would enhance learning, comprehensive, and achievement. It was during year two that the faculty began to accept the notion of "student as worker." and "teacher as facilitator." With these concepts in mind, the school opened the Student Credit Union where students could open their own savings accounts and secure loans. A Teen Court with jury of peers was implemented. An area judge volunteered his time to the Teen Court. Teen Court was held in evening in one of local courtrooms with students serving as lawyers. The school established a Health Based School Clinic to provide for the needs of the students. Students could have physical examinations and also get counseling for emotional problems in the clinic.

Partnerships with a grocery store chain brought tutors to the school. In return, store employees used the recreational facilities in the school. From this partnership, the school founded the "Learning Connection." The program provided tutoring, job placement, and assessment programs for students. The "Learning Connection" was supported by grants and the grocery store chain.

The school attendance records, reviewed at the end of the third year indicated that attendance was up. Records showed that college-bound students rose from 25% to 69%. In addition, drop- out rates were down and test scores up.

The faculty felt that the quality of relationships and the level of trust based on honest communication had improved over the three years. Also, they felt that the honesty allowed disagreements with an increasing respect for diversity among faculty and students. Students felt real pride to be part of the school. Faculty and students expressed a sense of ownership in the school. The visibility and recognition coming to the school especially was appreciated by the faculty and

students. A local business journal recognized the teachers' work in the school in an article published in year three. The McNeil-Lehrer program on PBS featured the school on a special program on education.

Case Study Three

This elementary school, one of three elementary schools within a suburban school system, houses grades K-4. It is located in a Southern University town of 35,000 and has 480 students: 51% white and 49% minority. Over the past 10 years, the demographics have changed with the number of minority students increasing every year. There is a major university in the town within 5 minutes of the school. The school neighborhood is well established with homes owned primarily by university personnel. The school was thought to be the school of preference throughout the town, but the growth of the town with changing student demographics has changed this perception. The school no longer serves only the affluent university population but now has a rising percentage of students characterized as low SES and minority. Some community members have correlated this change with a decrease in school excellence.

The instructional staff consists of 35 certified members and six non-certified members. The male principal, who has been at the school for the past 6 years, is assisted by a part-time assistant principal and a full-time counselor. The principal initiated the school's involvement in the empowerment effort by contacting one of the project directors and requesting the opportunity to participate.

During the spring of the second year in the project, some teachers wrote and received a grant providing the school with technical assistance and stipends for teachers working with a consultant to implement whole language instruction. A retreat was held during the summer, with the superintendent, the two assistant superintendents, and the special education director in attendance. Again, the majority

of the staff attended the retreat. As a result of the feedback from the year before, this retreat was held for 2 days, with the option of staying overnight at the state park. The presenter for the second day was one of the third grade teachers. During the third year, a number of changes occurred in the instructional program. Many of the changes emanated from teacher identification of significant issues and concerns about meeting the needs of students at the school. Instead of complaining about those concerns, the faculty shifted towards bringing ideas for solutions for those problems to the Empowerment Committee.

This presented a radical change from the manner in which teachers addressed concerns early in the project. It appeared that involvement in the decision process created more of a sense of problem ownership on the part of the faculty. For example, teachers implemented the portfolio assessment process. They had experimented with the concept through a project mini-grant the past year and found strategies that made portfolios useful to them. In particular, they discovered that, though individual videos prepared for portfolios were expensive, parents were eager to contribute blank videos at the beginning of the year to be used in the year-long videotaping of children for individual portfolios. Faculty saw videos as valuable in documenting students who exhibited some of the characteristics of an empowered child: responsibility, creativity, and group leadership. Most important to the teachers was the use of portfolios for student self-assessment purposes. Students would conference with their teachers regarding their own assessment of their work collected in the portfolio. In fact, students chose their "best pieces" for a showcase section of their portfolio and were able to discuss why they chose those particular examples of their work.

In addition, faculty sought an increased emphasis on whole language instruction with the strategy being adopted by additional grade levels. Finally, the multi-age team adopted cooperative

learning strategies with great success.

In the spring of the third year, the faculty and students made a video about the school and their attempts to empower teachers and students. The faculty presented the video at a school board meeting. According to the principal of this school, The most significant impact made throughout the empowerment effort was the manner in which teachers worked together to provide a better place for students to learn. The level of dialogue and effort to find more effective ways to help students develop academic skills was enlarged over the three years.

Case Study Four

The school in this case study is located in the suburbs of a large western city noted for it domination by the Mormon religious faith. So pervasive is the religious influence that the school enjoys a special relation with its community based on the strong family focus found in the Mormon faith. Also heightening this community bond is the fact that the school is the only high school in the district. The social life of the community evolves around the activities within this school.

The school has approximately 1200 students in grades 9 through 12. The school expects to have 1600 students by fall, 1992. The principal, a graduate of the school, was appointed in 1988. Most of the faculty were his teachers when he attended the school. There is a great emphasis within the school in fine arts and the performing arts, and certain competitive sports such as water polo and swimming. Most community recreational activities take place in the school. The majority of the students and faculty are middle class whites of the Mormon faith.

The superintendent of the district was instrumental in the initial involvement of the school in the Danforth project. The superintendent, hired in 1987, wanted to give schools a greater sense of empowerment through his leadership style. He granted autonomy to the high school, urging them to

take initiative in restructuring the school for greater teacher and student involvement.

During year one, the principal and lead teacher, with input from the small faculty sessions, organized a building-level committee to begin discussion around the various issues that were surfacing in the small group meetings. The prevalent theme emerging was that faculty felt very unempowered working in such a run-down environment. The teachers felt that the physical plant was in disarray. Teachers also felt that no one had listened to their complaints about the poor facilities for years. They felt that they would feel more empowered if they could "make the environment better." In addition, the faculty felt that students would benefit from the changes.

After discussions with various faculty committees, the faculty decided to focus on building student pride in the school. With the physical changes creating a new pride in the school, the faculty wanted to build student commitment and involvement.

In the spring of year two, the principal formed the Principal's Advisory Committee comprised of 3 juniors, 3 seniors and 3 students from various other grades. The students rotate each time the committee meets. The committee discusses student concerns and problems. Many issues previously handled by the principal were delegated to the student government during year two. It was felt that for greater student empowerment, students must be meaningfully involved in identifying and solving issues of relevance to them. The principal stated at the end of year two that the students solved problems more effectively than he did previously.

The formal Student Pride program was developed and initiated during the spring of year two. The purpose of the formal program was to recognize students who were good citizens in the school. Each week a drawing was held to see who would win ten dollars. Names would be placed into the drawing of students who had not been tardy or absent during the week. Also, the principal would pass

out cards for free meals at a local fast food restaurant to students he "caught doing something good." In addition, the faculty decided to require citizenship credits for graduation to reinforce the norm of student responsibility and leadership within the school.

During year three, the faculty decided to give parents a display case to use in any way that they wished. Parents could recognize anyone or any program of their choice. Students designed and opened a new restaurant in the school. In addition, remodeling changes in the student cafeteria were planned by the students.

In other areas, 18 teachers adopted cooperative learning as a model of instruction in their classrooms. This grew out of the growing team-collaborative ideas developing among faculty in the school. Teachers developed a program on drug awareness that brought national recognition to the school. The school received the Drug Prevention Excellence Award from Washington. Finally, the school was selected as one of four high schools in the state to be designated as Outstanding School. For this, the school received $10,000.

Theme Analysis

Five themes emerged as critical in implementing student empowerment efforts in the schools. Each theme is discussed with examples from the four cases.

Theme One: Early Identification of a Definition

The four schools that experienced greater success in establishing measures to empower students did not frame student empowerment as a power struggle with students taking over the school. Instead, these four schools developed a working definition of students empowerment, within the first year of the project, that focused on student responsibility, student successful experiences, developing student competence, and student choice.

Theme Two: Intense Focus On Students As a School Value

All four schools centered their empowerment work, formally and informally, on students. It was as if these schools were comfortable with the notion of "student as team member" and "student as worker" rather than "student as product". Specific ways in which these schools made this value operational included (1) developing student problem-solving skills, (2) giving students a stake in the success of the organization, (3) developing student academic skills, and (4) developing student self-evaluative skills and opportunities for engaging in self-assessment.

Problem-Solving Skills

One example from the secondary level is the training in problem solving and leadership skills provided the high schools students in Case One. Interviews with some of these students indicate that they felt an increasing since of self-efficacy in facing decisions. Teen Court, implemented in Case Two, provided students with much opportunity to problem solve in very relevant situations.

Stake in the Organization

Faculty at the four schools saw student input into planning, both instructionally and organizationally, as an important mechanism for increasing student stake in school effectiveness. Students participating in the Leadership Retreat in Case One felt a greater need to act responsibly as a team member in all school functions. One student said, "I have a responsibility to make school activities, both in the classroom and outside the classroom, successful. This team concept facilitated the notion of "student as worker."

The Student Pride program implemented in Case Four gave students a critical role in changing the physical environment of the school as well as a responsibility to drive the school in the direction of excellence. The school in Case Two involved students on teams of faculty, parents, and community

members involved in operationalizing the values and beliefs undergirding the school organization.

Academic Skills

The Student Pride program in Case Four illustrates a specific school strategy to encourage academic achievement. Integral to this program was the recognition given to students who make gains in academic arenas. The school in Case Two restructured the delivery of instruction to better meet the learning needs of its diverse student population. The reorganization of the schools into schools within schools was an attempt to create a learning environment more conducive to student academic success by meeting individual needs. The focus on whole language instruction in Case Three was predicated on teacher beliefs that learning in the language arts and reading is more successful for students because the students construct their own meaning in the whole language approach. The implementation of portfolio assessment grew from teacher concerns that empowered students must have the means to display growth and development in areas of creative problem solving, student responsibility, group leadership, and self-assessment not easily measured by traditional assessment strategies.

Self-Evaluation

Student involvement in portfolio self-assessment in Case Three is one example of a strategy to help students take responsibility for determining how well they are achieving their instructional goals. Teachers interviewed felt that, at the beginning of the project, that students "didn't have a clue" about the criteria on which their performance was being evaluated. This passive role became much more active as students began assessing their own performance. They also became more interested in the quality of their work.

Theme Three: Flexibility and Resourcefulness

Characteristic of these four schools was their resourcefulness in finding expertise, funds, manpower, and time to support their innovation. All drew on their communities, whether it be a university, business and industry, outside consultants, or funding sources, in order to implement changes. One school gained the expertise of industry trainers who volunteered to conduct the Leadership Retreats on weekends. The school in Case Two gained industry assistance in conducting an "Environmental Audit" prior to its Think Tank activities. The faculty wrote grants that funded numerous school projects. In some cases, school and outside environmental boundaries disappeared creating a sense of school-community collaboration and responsibility for helping every student succeed. This openness created a floodgate of opportunity for implementation of new ideas.

These four schools demonstrated great flexibility in thinking about how to construct an effective learning environment for each child, how the school day should look, how roles and responsibilities should be restructured to give students greater choice and autonomy, as well as how to interact and utilize resources within and outside the school.

Theme Four: Risk Taking and Experimentation

Critical to creating environments where all students have the opportunity to become empowered is participant belief that one can make mistakes, take risks, and experiment with new ideas. As students and teachers become more and more involved in making the basic decisions of the school, they must be encouraged to experiment and in so doing, sometimes they will fail. Principals in such schools must set the climate for risk-taking by becoming a facilitator. Teachers in such schools must establish the climate for risk taking in the classroom by also becoming a facilitator.

Theme Five: Principal Facilitative Leadership

The four principals in these cases exercised in varying degrees facilitative leadership within

their own schools. The principal in Case Two developed a Management Team approach to administration and leadership with faculty, assistant principals, students, and parents having decision-making opportunities and responsibility for making the school effective for its diverse student population. The team approach adopted by the school in Case One illustrates how the principal viewed himself as yet another member of a number of teams. He saw his role as resource finder, innovative thinker, and student advocate. In all, these principals functioned as the "conscience," providing a continuing focus on students. Also, they were able to grapple with their own egos and felt secure enough to share leadership. For one principal, this did not come easily at first. However, "backing off" at the advice of a project facilitator, though it was hard, taught this principal that teacher leadership and initiative made his job much easier relative to attaining the changes that would create a more empowered school environment for faculty and students. As he said, "Empowerment is more feet running in the same direction."

Implications for Practice

These findings from the project schools have implications for change efforts within the school context.

Trust and Principal Facilitative Leadership

It is evident that staff commitment to substantive change processes that heighten student and teacher interaction demands considerable time for staff to build trust within the organization. Participative decision making and problem-solving teamwork require greater teacher and student collaboration and concomitant priority setting and problem solving. Teachers must grow to trust that students can take responsibility for the direction that the school takes in most areas.

Principal and teacher interaction becomes more collegial in an empowered school, intensifying the

interactions between these parties. Principals must reflect on their own leadership style and adopt a more facilitative style in working with teachers. It only was when the principal in Case Three stepped back from directing and taking all responsibility for decision making that teacher leaders arose to take the initiative and responsibility for making the school successful through student success.

Create a Culture Supportive of Experimentation

Risk taking and participant experimentation are necessary ingredients in empowering students. Mistakes are accepted and viewed as learning experiences. Children and teachers are encouraged to try new ideas and experiment with new approaches.

Enhance Student Leadership and Problem-Solving Skills

Change efforts to empower schools will need to consider the complexity of communication channels in such organizations. Traditional hierarchical patterns predicted the contact points. However, teaming, networks, cooperative problem solving, participative decision making, collaboration, and inquiry learning suggest that communication will occur among people not normally in the communication channels in bureaucratic organizations. These include students who must be viewed as invested in the learning processes that occur in the school.

In addition, these new structures and processes for doing the work of the empowered organization indicate that communication will occur for characteristically different purposes. Instead of communication carrying the dictates of the upper hierarchy to those lower in the organization, all participants will communicate in order to make major decisions about the organization, structure the work of the organization, and develop strategies for accomplishing the goals of the organization. Skills in group dynamics, group process, verbal and nonverbal communication, group task goal setting and strategic planning become important skills for everyone. Especially, students require these skills in

order to function as empowered school participants.

Select an Outside Facilitator

Creating empowered schools is an evolutionary process. Roles, behaviors, attitudes, and ways of doing the work of the organization are being restructured. The change effort is enhanced by the support of an outside facilitator who has expertise in organizational consultation (Schein, 1969). This individual can assist the school in processing what is happening and how to effectively deal with the conflict and problems that arise.

Conclusions

This three-year effort to create empowered schools suggests that the restructuring of roles, relationships, and rules must be viewed as evolutionary and requires participant structuring of that process. In order to empower students within the school environment, several variables appear to be pivotal in the effort. These are trust among all participants, an intense focus on students as a school value with the means to operationalize that focus, the evolution of new communication channels and need for problem-solving skills, creation of an environment supportive of risk taking and experimentation, creative ways to secure outside resources, an outside, supportive facilitator skilled in organizational development and group process skills who can be on-call to the school at all times, and principal leadership that is energetic, intensely focused on student, not threatened by teacher and student competence or autonomy, and facilitative in nature. Finally, and most importantly, the focus of empowerment efforts must clearly rest on a vision of improved learning for all students. The ultimate test for any school change effort lies in how well all students achieve, are successful, and become independent, life-long learners.

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